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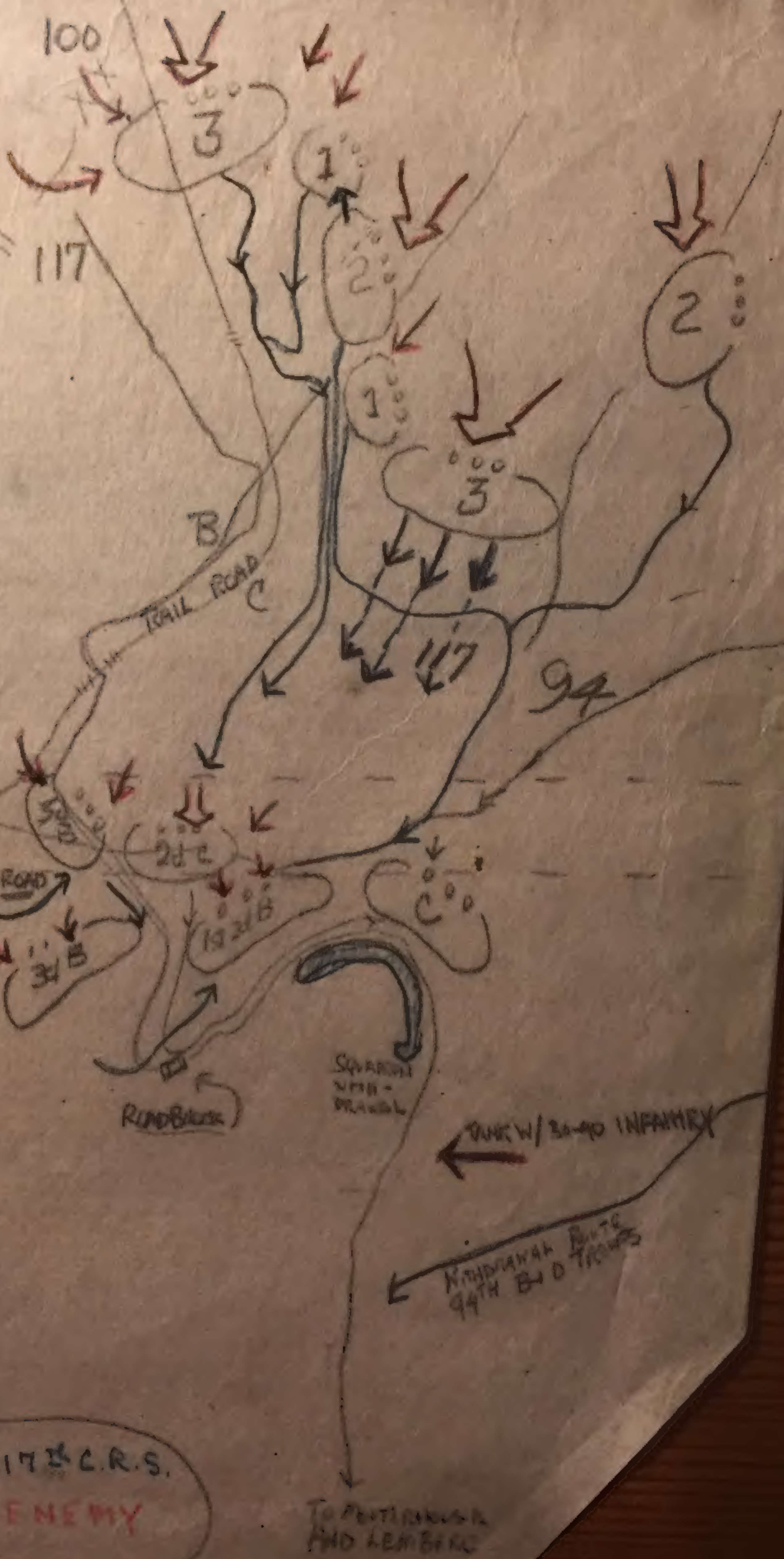
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START OF ACTION  
UNTIL 01-0415

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01-0415  
TO 01-0515

01-0515 TO  
END OF ACTION

— MOVEMENTS OF 117 & C.R.S.  
— DIRECTION OF ENEMY  
ATTACKS





**Unit:** 117th Cavalry Squadron (Mech.)  
**Action:** South of Bitch, France, 1 January, 1945  
**Source:** Interview with officers and enlisted men;  
unit records  
**Interviewer:** Captain W.E. Waters  
**Place and date  
of interview:** 14-18 January 1945, Ringendorf, France  
**Maps:** XXVII-13 France, 5:6 and 7:8; XXII-14 1:2 and  
3:4  
**Journals:** Unit Journal, 117th Recon. Sqdn (Mech.) January

(Interviews held when unit was in reserve. Attached to manuscript is a memorandum - "Colonel Hudelson's Decisions during New Year's Eve Attack" by Lt. Colonel William B. Goddard)



HEADQUARTERS SEVENTH ARMY  
HISTORICAL SECTION  
APO 758 U.S. ARMY

23 March 1945

SUBJECT: Colonel Hudelson's Decisions during New Year's Eve attack.

On the 13th of March 1945, I visited Col. Hudelson, Commanding Officer, GJR, 14th Armored Division, at his CP in Wilwisheim, Alsace. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the German New Year's Eve attack.

The following is written from the notes taken by me during this discussion.

Although the information of the enemy available to Col. Hudelson prior to this German attack was essentially correct as to the time of the enemy attack, the strength of the enemy force was greatly under-estimated. The G-2 report from VI Corps Headquarters approximated the enemy strength at 710 troops. An idea of the inaccuracy of this report can be obtained from the fact that over 710 Germans were killed during the first day of this attack. That figure is derived from the actual count of dead bodies on the front lines. To give further emphasis to this statement, Col. Hudelson said that, because of number of dead that had become piled up in front of the machine guns, these guns had to be moved, in many instances, to new positions to continue to fire with an unobstructed field of fire.

*ultimate (corrected by Col. Hudelson) W.S.H.*

The plans for the defense of the position of the Seventh Army front held by the Hudelson Task Force had to be confined to establishing successive lines of withdrawal, because the width of the front and the troops available to man it did not permit the holding out of a reserve of sufficient size to be utilized as a counterattacking force.

*section* The 117th Recon Squad was a part of the Hudelson Task Force commanded by Col. Hudelson. This unit held the left flank of the Task Force defensive position.

When the German attack was launched just before midnight on 31 December 1944, the 117th Recon Squad front line units



*many*  
were struck by a powerful force. The attack was continued *forcing back*  
with such strength that the enemy succeeded in penetrating  
the front lines of the 117th Recon Squad. When the Commanding  
Officer, 117th Recon Squad informed Col. Hudelson of the  
critical situation that had developed in his area and requested  
assistance, he was told that the 19th AIB had just become  
available to him and that this unit would be ordered to the  
area of the 117th Recon Squad to give assistance in checking  
the German drive. (The 19th AIB arrived in the Hudelson Task  
Force area at 1000, 1st January). However, by the time the  
19th AIB arrived in the 117th Recon Squad area, the German  
penetration had become so successful, that the 19th AIB had  
to be employed to fill the gaps that the enemy had located in  
the lines of the 117th Recon Squad defensive position.

*reco*  
*attack*  
*Task Force*  
This information was forwarded to Col. Hudelson. Col.  
Hudelson, then, instructed the Commanding Officer, 117th Recon  
Squad to fall back to the next delaying position that had pre-  
viously been ~~prepared~~ and to use the 19th AIB to cover the  
limited withdrawal of the 117th Recon Squad to its new defen-  
sive position. The information of the strength of the enemy  
at this time justified this decision, especially in view of  
the fact that the new position was a much stronger one. This  
proved to be true, for the German attack was stopped on this  
line. The line was still being held at the time these notes  
were taken.

*west*  
Captain, U.S.A.

*Corrected by  
Hudelson  
into  
original*  
WILLIAM B. GODDARD  
Lieut Colonel, Inf  
7th Army Historian



The material upon which the accompanying account is based was assembled between 14 January and 18 January, 1945 with the active cooperation of Major Emsel, Commanding Officer of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.) and his staff.

The organization was in the town of Ringendorf at the time, in a reserve status; easy access to the unit's records and to the participants in the action was therefore available. Considerable use was made of the personal interview method; interviews were held with leaders of all ranks whose elements played a vital part in the action.

HARRIS E. WATERS  
Captain, U.S.A.



**THE 117th CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON (MECH.)  
ACTION at BITCHE on 1 JANUARY 1945**

On the night of 31 December, 1944 - 1 January 1945, the enemy launched a strong attack against United States forces holding positions generally along an east-west line running south of the Alsatian city of Bitch. The apparent purpose of the enemy was to create pressure against the northern flank of Allied forces in Alsace in an attempt to preclude their reacting to the Ardennes offensive in the north; other less immediate ends such as the re-occupation of Alsace may be assumed.

One of the units struck in at least regimental strength by elements of the 257 Infantry Division was the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.). The determined resistance offered by this squadron inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy and delayed his advances. This is an account of the squadron's activities in the early phases of the enemy assault upon Alsace.

During the period covered by this account, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.) was a part of the Hodelson Task Force, the mission of which was to maintain a defensive line facing the enemy along a line running generally south-easterly from the vicinity of Bitch.

The specific mission of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.) was assigned on 22 December, 1944. It was: with the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.) to relieve the 106th Cavalry Group in the positions held by that unit and to relieve elements of the 399th Infantry of the 100th Infantry Division in their



positions which extended from the northern end of lake Hasselfurt south-westerly to Road Junction ( 777-457).

Upon the receipt of these orders, the CP of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.) was set up at Mouterhouse as was that of the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.) and arrangements made to physically relieve the units then on the line on 23 December, 1944. Positions on the line were assigned and occupied by the relieving forces. From west to east the order was: First B Troop, 117th with its left flank resting against the 399th Infantry, next was C Troop of the 117th, then came D Troop of the 94th and finally B Troop of the 94th with its right flank in position against the left flank of the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion. The CPs of both 117th Troops was near the cross road (779-462).

"A" Troop of the 117th was not employed in the line but was held in reserve at Mouterhouse. E Troop of the 117th, the artillery Troop, took up positions west of Mouterhouse, so emplaced as to be able to support both Troops on the line. The artillery Troop, of the 94th was located near Peterphilippe.

The remaining Troop of the 117th, the Light Tank Troop, F, was disposed throughout the Squadron front, ten tanks being assigned to B Troop, five to C and the remainder held in reserve at the Squadron CP.

A platoon of Company B of the 83d Chemical Mortar Battalion having been designated as support for the 117th, four 4.2 Chemical Mortars were emplaced behind the third platoon of C Troop with a



field of fire covering the entire squadron front. Additional artillery support was provided by the 500th F.A. Battalion from its emplacements in the vicinity of Sacrenthal.

One platoon of the 645 Tank Destroyer Battalion was assigned the 117th. This unit with its three Tank Destroyers was originally assigned to C Troop of the 117th and held in the vicinity of the C Troop Command Post.

The terrain occupied by the 117th was of a particularly uneven nature with wide variations in elevation. Vegetation was quite thick; fire and hardwoods with a young growth intermingled restricted visibility in many cases down to 150 yards. Access to the larger part of the area was by primitive, narrow trails.

The period 23 December-31 December was employed in making the defensive positions as strong as possible. Positions were organized with the view of utilizing to its utmost the concentration of fire-power from the automatic weapons. Platoons were disposed as strong-points; foxholes and fortified slit-trenches were dug, automatic weapons were dismounted and emplaced in fortified positions, tanks and armored cars were hull-defiladed. Connecting trenches were dug and obstacles were installed ahead of the positions - these obstacles consisting of from the front rearwards, first a field of mines, next a double-apron barbed wire entanglement, lastly concertina wire, with trip flares, mines and booby-traps interspersed throughout. Additional concertina wire was laid across the more obvious routes of approach. An extensive communication system was installed, which



platoon was in telephone communication with the Troop and Squadron Command Posts; wire and radio was used to communicate with sections. Telephone communication was installed to an CP of the 399th Infantry of the left flank of the Squadron position (780 - 488).

Artillery concentrations were prepared, so arranged as to cover the town of Bitche and the road running southeast from Bitche towards Eguelshardt.

2 Troop had one of its forward observers located with the 3d platoon of B Troop, the other on a relatively high hill (hill 430) in the rear of the 3d platoon of C.

The period up to 31 December was relatively quiet. Enemy patrol activity, however, was continuous; artillery fire and the watchfulness of the personnel prevented any damage being done with one exception. This occurred during the early morning hours of 29 December when an enemy patrol of one officer and three men probing into the 3d platoon of B Troop killed the sentry guarding the CP, injured three men and captured the platoon leader, Lt Middlebrook who was asleep at the time.

During this period the artillery Troop had been firing frequent missions against patrols as stated above, and, on the afternoon of 31 December against an artillery survey party seen working just east of Bitche. Fire was brought to bear on this party by the Forward Observer's resulting in its destruction. Enemy artillery to the north in the vicinity of Bitche had attempted to register in on E Troop, but E Troop's positions were so defiladed as to be out of



the reach of the enemy's guns.

The night of 31 December-1 January was clear and very cold. The moon came up shortly after dark; reflecting on the snow it provided a visibility in the open to about 300 yards; visibility in the wooded areas where the fighting was conducted, was considerably less, however. The troops on the line, though tired, were particularly alert having come, by experience, to expect enemy probing at night.

The evening was quite quiet; however at about 2100 the forward elements began reporting shouting and sounds as of celebrating from the direction of Bitche. Heavy traffic on the road southeast from Bitche was also reported. When C Troop reported receiving shell fire, probably 88mm from the northeast, artillery fire was called for and laid down with seemingly effective results for the enemy fire soon ceased.

The first activity of the attack which was to be launched was reported by the 3d platoon of B Troop. They had received word, at about 2330 from the OP of the 399th Infantry with which they had telephone communication, that the OP was surrounded by sixty to eighty enemy. Artillery support had been requested. Accordingly, the three Tank Destroyers which were with the 117th were dispatched to the Infantry OP and, also, the artillery of E Troop were brought to bear. The Tank Destroyers reported to the area and laid down fire all around the house (780488) in which the OP was located. They withdrew upon being fired at from the rear and upon being informed that the 399th Infantry was sending reinforcements of its own. E



Troop's artillery lay down heavy fire close to the house after having moved two of its six guns to a position from which it could fire, the OP being a little too far to the left for a Troop as originally emplaced. The last word from the OP was a request to lay fire directly on the house saying it would probably withstand it and wishing the men of the 117th a "Happy New Year".

At midnight all artillery supporting the front line positions laid down fire to their north. Prearranged concentrations were laid down the ditch - aqueduct road. Based on later developments it is probable that this road was being heavily used by the enemy at this time and heavy enemy casualties are assumed to have resulted from the fire.

From midnight on the development of the attack was rapid. The 2d platoon of B at about 0015 reported a large number of enemy ahead of their wire and in the draw to their right while almost simultaneously the 2d platoon of C was confronted with a strong group of enemy and forced to commit all weapons. Next to be engaged by the enemy was the 3d platoon of B; they were under attack from the left rear by enemy who had infiltrated and passed their left flank. By 0045 all platoons of B were under rigorous attack, one of the main enemy targets appearing to be directed against the 2d platoon. By 0100 all platoons of C were being hotly engaged, with the exception of the 1st platoon on the left flank - this platoon received but light fire from the left during the time it stayed forward on the line. In this Troop the main shock of the enemy was directed against the 3d or center







enemy having forced out the flank. Under weight of numbers, three  
the men from their positions; they fell back across country and  
reassembled near the cross road in the rear. This platoon could  
evacuate none of its equipment, personal arms in many cases being  
left behind. The other two platoons of C Troop held firm. As stated  
above, the 1st platoon was receiving but light fire from its left;  
the 2d platoon was resisting successfully all attempts of the enemy  
to infiltrate and break into its position.

The platoon of chemical mortars had been replaced behind the  
3d platoon of C. When the enemy shock jarred the 3d platoon of C  
from its position it was seen that it would be impossible to evacuate  
the mortars; the weapons were accordingly destroyed and the approximately  
30 men fell back to the cross road.

The left spearhead of the enemy attack was directed against  
the 2d platoon of B Troop. Reorganized after being repulsed by  
artillery fire, the enemy came forward again and by 0200 had overrun  
the 1st and 2d sections of the platoon. The 3d section which covered  
the right flank of the 1st platoon held firm although out of communication  
with the 1st platoon, the leader of the 2d platoon attached his 3d  
section to the 1st platoon and ordered it to continue to hold while  
the other two sections fell back.

The 1st and 3d platoons of B, meanwhile continued under strong  
attack - the attack on the 3d platoon coming from the left rear, that  
on the 1st platoon coming against their front from the center to the  
left flank. At 0215 the 3d platoon leader reported the enemy to be



overrunning his left flank.

Back in the Squadron CP at Montmarouse contact was continuously maintained with the situation forward. By 0300 it was determined that the enemy attack was in force; it was therefore decided to send reinforcements of the Hudson Task Force. Upon requesting a troop of the 117th, the Commanding Officer of the 117th was told that it had already been committed on the 62d Airborne Infantry Sector and was being held by A of the 125th Engineers. Permission was given to send Company B of the 540th Engineers.

With enemy pressure increasing along the line and the enemy already pushed from their positions it was decided that the Squadron should be pushed back to its former positions and that the 540th Engineers be sent forward with the Company of Engineers, to take charge of the defense line. The 540th Engineers were ordered to drop back to the vicinity of the stream and to take part in the new positions.

The order to withdraw came to the Squadron at 0330. In B Troop, it was decided that the 540th Engineers would take its position and cover the 1st Platoon. The 540th Engineers would take the position and cover the 1st Platoon. The 540th Engineers would take the position and cover the 1st Platoon. In the 1st Platoon, the two platoons would take the position and cover the 1st Platoon. But when the 1st Platoon received the instruction, it found that the 540th Engineers were not in the position.



vehicle in the area at the head of the lake between the two forces. At 11:00 AM, they had to be down the east side of the lake. This was the route followed by the 1st platoon (with one section of the 2d platoon attached). The 3d platoon withdrew southward along the west side of the lake under heavy fire. The two platoons effected contact at the east of the lake - they then proceeded to the cross road.

The 2d platoon of C Troop, under the command of Lt. Cunn, was continuing to hold its position successfully when the order to withdraw was given. Infiltrating enemy had been wiped out; however the platoon was running low on small arms ammunition. Keeping the automatic weapons in position until the last moment, the platoon was mounted up and withdrew to the rear without the loss of equipment or of personnel.

The 1st platoon of C, meanwhile, still under relatively light fire and out of communication with the other elements, held its position. But upon noting that the area on his left, that which had been held by the 2d platoon of B, was under heavy artillery fire and upon seeing enemy troops on the ground from which the 3d platoon of C had been thrown, realized that his platoon was in danger of being surrounded. He then decided to withdraw. On the way out, he effected contact with the 2d platoon coming down from its position and together the two platoons proceeded to the cross road.

Arriving at the cross road with the Company of Engineers, Captain Sacco found the cross road already outposted by elements of Troops B and C with additional elements constantly retreating back. He then proceeded to organize his first defense line - an east - west line



about 400 yards north of the cross road.

The left flank position, west of the north-south road was assigned to the 3d platoon of B; the right flank position was assigned to the 2d platoon of C which had started back along the road down which it had come to serve this purpose. One platoon of Engineers (this was their first close combat experience) was assigned to each of the two platoons of the 117th. The remaining platoon of Engineers was held in reserve south of the cross road. The three Tank Destroyers were employed at the cross road in such a way as to cover the platoons going up the defense line.

The two units assigned to establish the defense line moved out to occupy their positions. Pushing north from the cross road, the 3d platoon of B came under heavy fire from the front and left. The 2d platoon of C moved a short distance eastward preparatory to taking up its positions but ran into heavy fire, automatic and possibly self propelled from a draw to the north.

As the above operations were being carried out, the remaining elements of the B Troop were being assembled just south of the cross road. Elements of C Troop as they returned, were assembled to the east.

The only withdrawal route for the Squadron lay to the south; the road, however, which running south at the cross road, turns sharply and runs northwest, then, in a long curve, turns south again. As the action north of the cross road developed it became clear that the direction of the enemy advance was such as to imperil this southeast-



northeast strip of road near the curve by-passing east of the 2d platoon of K. With this road cut, the Squadron would be trapped.

It was therefore decided to relinquish the 1st defensive line north of the cross road and to establish a new line about 400 yards to the south. A strong, fairly straight line could be set up here with positions generally north of - and protecting - the southwest-northeast strip of road.

Accordingly, withdrawal to the new defensive line was begun. With the 2d platoon of C remaining in its position and covering, the 3d platoon of B was drawn directly south. It fell back about 400 yards to high ground, taking up a position on the west side of the north-south strip of the withdrawal route. At the same time the remainder of B Troop, containing elements of both the 1st and 2d platoons and which had been assembled south of the 1st defense line, was moved across the road to positions in line with those of the 3d platoon. These positions having been taken up, the 2d platoon of C was withdrawn between the two B Troop elements. It then was joined with the remaining elements of C Troop and placed in position near the curve where the southwest-northeast road turns south again. The line so formed was a strong defensive position; the light tanks, TDs and armored cars were employed with the plan of effecting the maximum coverage of the area from which the enemy effort was being made. The time was now about 0515.

From the time of the establishment of the second defensive line until about 0630 there was a lull in enemy activity. The



defending units continued to strengthen their positions and when, about 0830 the enemy attacked again, generally in a frontal effort, he was driven back with heavy losses.

During all phases of the action, Capt Zecca was kept informed of the situation of the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron on its right flank. The attack against the 94th had been considerably less intense than that against the 117th; however the two troops of the 94th had been withdrawn in the face of mounting enemy pressure to prevent their being outflanked and to present with the 117th a fairly even line facing the enemy.

At about 0730 one platoon of the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion arrived at the 117th's position south of the cross road; the remainder of the battalion arrived at Captain Zecca's Command Post near Peterphilippe at 0930. The mission of this unit was to launch an attack and to regain the original positions held by the 117th. The Company of Engineers, the Tank Destroyers and the 117th were to be employed, the 117th taking secondary objectives and organizing the ground as the attack progressed. As a line of departure, Captain Zecca suggested the east-west road north of the second defense line and the Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon of the Infantry commenced a reconnaissance preparatory to launching the attack. Patrols of the 117th were also sent out, their mission to gain information concerning enemy activity on the left flank.

All reports at the Command Post indicated numerous enemy in front of and on the left flank of the positions. Directly in front



an aggressive enemy unit supported by what was probably a self propelled 88 was in a position controlling the road, to the west on the left flank large enemy patrols were moving south along the railroad, and on the right the 94th reported that a heavy enemy tank had passed them with thirty or forty dismounted men and was loaded for the withdrawal route behind the 117th. To relieve the immediate threat imposed by this tank, last reported at (794-462) Captain Zeeva dispatched a Tank Destroyer which took up a position from which it could fire on the side of the tank should the latter try to break out of the cover of the woods onto the road.

At the Squadron Command Post in Mouterhouse contact was continuously maintained with the forward units and, until about noon, with the Task Force Command Post at Barentnael. Reports were received of heavy pressure all along the front of the Hudson Task Force.

It being apparent that the right flank of the Hudson Task Force was falling back and that the enemy's intention was to infiltrate and strike the Squadron's position from the rear, it was decided that the positions held by the 117th and the 94th should be relinquished. The Squadron Command Post having come under artillery fire, it was moved about a mile southwest on the road leading out of Mouterhouse.

Orders to withdraw were then given to the elements on the line. D Troop, 94th was to leave first followed by B Troop, 94th; the former was directed to go to Barentnael to assist there, the latter to proceed to a point about half way between Mouterhouse and Barentnael.



There a road branches south toward Reipertswiller; B Troop was to protect this road junction. Following the 94th, the 117th should proceed southward, then turn right along the road leading to Lemberg. Last was to come the 19th Infantry Battalion (armored) whose mission was to cover the withdrawal of the other units.

The withdrawal commenced upon the receipt of the order and in the manner specified. Behind them as they withdrew the last element out blew a roadblock in the road - this road block consisted of a crater about 18 feet followed by a felling of trees for about 50 yards on each side of the road. The only element not engaged in the withdrawal was a strong combat patrol of 20 men led by Lt. Byers; this patrol was out to the left front of the position and, isolated by the demolitions, made its way to the rear later upon observing large enemy forces on their way south.

D Troop of the 94th proceeded toward Lauterhouse on its way to Baerenthal followed by B Troop. But when the head of the column arrived in the outskirts of Lauterhouse it came under artillery and small arms fire coming from the direction of the Baerenthal road. This indicated the impossibility of proceeding on its mission; the two troops of the 94th started back on the road it had come and withdrew to Lemberg as did the 117th. The columns avoided artillery fire which was falling intermittently on the road junction east of Lemberg but was heavily strafed by captured P-47s - these planes had German insignia and red tail assemblies. No U.S. air support was received by the 117th during the day's activity beyond the observation functions.



of the Squadron own air observer.

Upon leaving the defense area the Company of the 540th Engineers were released from the 117th. The 19th Armored Infantry covered the withdrawal by moving south along the road and across country until striking the Mouterhouse-Lezberg road. Then a movement was started east to Mouterhouse, however, upon learning from the experience of the 19th that Mouterhouse was in enemy hands, the 19th withdrew along the road Mouterhouse-Sarreinsberg and finally set up a defense line running generally from Sarreinsberg to Heipertsweiler in conjunction with C Troop, 117th which had been assigned to outpost Goetzzenbruck. C Troop stayed in this vicinity working with infantry units and was involved in heavy action.

During the night of 1-2 January with C Troop outposting Goetzzenbruck, B Troop at Zittersheim, A Troop, now back under Squadron control at Rostrig and the Squadron Command Post at Wingen, little enemy activity was experienced. These positions were maintained during the night; the next morning the 179th Infantry was brought up and disposed along the line already held. The 117th with the exception of C Troop was withdrawn from the line on the early morning of 3 January.

The violence of the action of 1 January is attested by the record of ammunition expenditure. In addition to the 800 rounds of artillery fired by E Troop the Squadron used:

116,000	Rounds	-	30 Calibre (Aalted)
14,220	"	-	45 Calibre
6,225	"	-	50 Calibre



5,100	Rounds	-	30 Calibre, Rifle
3,500	"	-	30 Calibre, Carbine
1,080	"	-	37 mm
60	"	-	60 mm (mortar)
90	"	-	81 mm (mortar)
275	Grenades		

Vehicle losses were relatively great, being 38 1/4 Tons, 12 armored cars, 6 light tanks M5a1, and 2 half-tracks M3a1 (These figures include losses suffered by A Troop in its action with the 62nd Armored Infantry not covered in this account). Almost all lost equipment was destroyed before abandonment. Personnel casualties were, killed: 1 Enlisted Man, wounded; 1 Officer 12 Enlisted Men; Missing in Action; 1 Officer 24 Enlisted Men, total 39. Seven Prisoners of War were taken by the Squadron during the action 31 December - 1 January. In his conclusion concerning the action, the Commanding Officer of the Squadron estimates enemy losses as over 1000 casualties including 500 killed.